



Massachusetts
Department
of
ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION

Motivating Employees to Reduce Waste in the Workplace

Waste reduction in the workplace hinges on the participation and support of employees, managers, and customers. It involves rethinking the way we do things and changing old habits. This is not easy, but rewards abound as resources and money are saved. This fact sheet outlines key concepts to help improve environmental and operational performance of waste reduction programs in the workplace.

Changing old habits and forming new ones is an on-going process that begins with exposure to, and assimilation of pertinent information. An individual uses information to understand the relative costs and benefits of adopting a new behavior. If a new practice isn't reinforced by an on-going perception that benefits outweigh costs, any change will likely be temporary.

It takes time, patience, and persistence. Below are ideas that have been used in other businesses and municipalities to educate and motivate employees to reduce waste and reduce operational costs.

Create a "Green Team"

A green team is an inter-department group that coordinates and implements practices to reduce waste and increase the efficiency of an organization's internal operations. Green teams may work hand-in-hand with an organization's senior management to build support among mid-level managers and staff for changes in decision-making. As employees are the experts on how operations work their involvement is critical to the success of any program.

- Solicit ideas from employees during management strategy meetings or budgetary discussions.
- Involve employees in decision-making processes.
- Involve **Green Team Members** in all aspects of an organization's management including waste reduction, energy conservation, and related operational improvements.

Garner commitments. Employees who make a personal commitment to changing their work practices are more likely to make these changes permanent than if directed to change their work processes by management.

Creative Images

In a time when we are bombarded with all kinds of information, strive to make your message stand out. Visual impressions can be stronger than words.

- Use a catchy logo and slogan for your program.
- Create pictures or graphics to draw attention to written materials or recycling containers.
- Use photos or displays to show people how much waste they generate.

Motivating Messages

Facts should be put in terms people can relate to and the message should be easy to understand. A surprising fact can help motivate a person to seek change.

- Explain why it is important to stop wasting resources. Where possible, present benefits in terms of cost savings, resources saved, customer satisfaction, corporate and personal responsibility.
- Present information so it stands out; avoid being redundant.
- Use pertinent and persuasive facts.
- Personalize information and relate it to what a person already knows.
- Don't assume employees and managers are familiar with key waste reduction words or concepts.
- Avoid giving too much information at once; give information in manageable pieces.

Person-to-Person Communication

In addition to distributing or posting written educational materials, present information person-to-person. It is more influential than written materials alone.

- Seek volunteers in each work unit who are willing to serve as "waste reduction coordinators." These coordinators provide a friendly and knowledgeable source of information throughout the organization.
- Train employees. Let them know they are expected to use resources carefully and participate in waste reduction programs. Explain how to prevent waste and recycle materials.
- Promote waste reduction in employee gatherings. Show what is being done well and what areas need improvement.

Incentives and Recognition

There are lots of great ways to motivate employees. Here are just a few:

- Graph progress to show people progress achieved by floor or other unit.
- Create a contest and award prizes or trophies (reused, of course).
- Financially reward employees for ideas that generate significant cost-savings and waste reduction.
- Recognize employees' waste reduction efforts in front of others using intranet postings, internal newsletters (e-news) or other means.

Set a Good Example

To help institutionalize new practices be sure to practice what you preach.

- If using promotional prizes, be sure they exemplify waste reduction (e.g., a coffee mug with your program's slogan, a refillable pen made from recycled plastic). Don't use prizes or materials that will become trash.
- Distribute information in the least wasteful way. Route messages electronically or post them on a central bulletin board. Print using both sides of the page and format documents to avoid excessive white space.
- Ask employees to bring their own plate or mug to gatherings where food and beverages will be served.

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